

Precious than Gold

by shuusetsu

Category: JunjÅ• Romantica

Genre: Romance, Tragedy

Language: English

Characters: A. Usami, Misaki T.

Pairings: A. Usami/Misaki T.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-08 16:14:19

Updated: 2016-04-11 13:17:48

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:47:12

Rating: M

Chapters: 2

Words: 8,729

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Usami Akihiko, a feared and respected Daimyo seemed to have made it his lifetime vow to make that one simple servant's life miserable. All Misaki wanted was freedom. But accused wrongly, that dream would probably just remain a dream until he dies.

1. Chapter 1

****warning: **non-consent, torture. read at your own risk!**

* * *

><p>Behind the almost translucent curtains made from threads of fine silver, there sat the most important and powerful being no one dared to defy. The Emperor.

He was synonymous to a God. A god of wealth and knowledge, a god whom everyone looked up to and feared at the same time. He was almost considered an immortal. However behind this nobility bestowed by the heavens, was also a mysteriousness no one could grasp.

"The Usami Clan got a hold of 'it'?" the Emperor's voice was so calm. It was so calm that it invoked fear instead.

"Y-yes...Your Majesty..." a stuttering Imperial Adviser replied, almost breaking his old back from deep bowing. "Shall I send assassins?"

"No...it's alright. You mustn't take the Usami Clan lightly adviser Chou. After all, they defeated the Sumi Clan...and in turn got what I've been seeking."

"But your Majesty..."

_"Don't worry...as long as they don't have an inkling that they're

holding a gem...they'd just treat it as stone."_

"I-if it's so important...then we should hurriedly-"

The silhouette behind the curtains moved making the old man bite his tongue. The smoke coming from the burning incense danced around the Emperor's perfect face, highlighting a wicked smile.

"I'm bored adviser..." the black eyes narrowed. "...they'd make a good entertainment before I take back from the Usami Clan...what should really belong to me..."

ã•ã•ã• **Precious than Gold ****ã'ã'ã' **

I

Rough Gem

His gaze was as far as the horizon could go. Getting farther and farther from his home, from his life, from everything he was, he could only wish to just disappear. If there was only a way for him to have stopped a war from breaking out, he would have done it. But he was a meer slave; not a child anymore yet still not a man. The likes of him, could only rely to where the smokes of war would bring him.

****"I worked as an attendant for the mistress..." a meek, frightened voice of a girl mumbled.

"Bring her to the servant's quarters...Next!"

Every time that word was being shouted, the line of young men and women and small children would flinch. To be looked at by the people whose hands were tainted by their parent's blood, was so disheartening. They were treating them, the prisoners of war, as objects for all purposes.

"...I'm..." the slender male who looked about twenty glanced at the man-in-charge.

The man-in-charge was scruffy looking, had uneven teeth, the expensive silk Kimono he was wearing totally made him comical. Yet his gaze at the war goods as if how one scrutinized a meat to buy was dangerous.

"...I'm...S-shino..."

Beside the stuttering Shino was a green-eyed, skin and bones figure. His name was Takahashi Misaki. A plain servant with the eyes of a living dead.

Takahashi Misaki worked for that stuttering guy's family. The guy beside him was a noble's son. And a noble's son, with such pretty face, and education, either he'd be used for his skills, or something inhuman. Beaten by the war between two Daimyos heart and soul, Misaki just stood there as cold as the floor he was standing on.

The man in-charge walked over to where the stuttering guy was and smirked. "Not important..." he said while grabbing the young man's chin, turning his face sideways. "Your crest on your robe...Son of

the Head of the poor losers then...?" the man haughtily gave a grin. "But, you are top class..."

He patted the frightened man on the cheek before handing him over to another one soldier who was just waiting silently on the side. "Take him, he'd be very useful."

Misaki and the son of the previous man he was serving looked at each other. They were not particularly close given their positions in society. But when their eyes met...they knew they would probably never see each other again.

"And you...what are you?"

Misaki just remained like a corpse. Blankly staring at his bleeding feet, not making any sign that he'd talk.

"TALK!" the man spat. Disgusting as it was that unwanted saliva landed on Misaki's dirty cheeks, the boy still remained closed to the world.

The hall still full of prisoners of war to be sorted grew silent. The man, who appeared to be useless was actually a skilled swordsman that within a matter of seconds, the blade of his katana was already grazing the boy's thin neck. The others on the line turned away. Afraid to get another splash of blood on their faces from the unruly persons who faced the same death earlier.

It wasn't a matter of whether the boy in front of him would say he was a noble or a peasant. For him, Misaki's sin was ignoring him. To be given this job and be able to act superior was something this man-in-charge had always wanted. Having a mere, odd looking boy ignore him like he was a lowly servant made him angry.

More pressure and that blade that could cut thick bodies of trees would be slicing into the boy's neck. However, he was stopped by a voice.

"Excuse me...Officer?"

Almost like a dog, the angry man earlier had turned into an obedient child upon seeing whose voice it was. He hurriedly left the object of his anger and bowed deeply at the new comer.

"Master Lee...why is a person of your status in this place?" it was disgusting to hear him. He was no more than obvious of his sweet talking.

The old man had sharp purple eyes. His lips in a gentle smile. In that tragic hall, it was only him who showed 'life'.

"I was having my stroll outside...but your voice could be heard even from a distance."

"My apologies Lee-sama!"

This old man called 'Master Lee' walked over to the boy with a bleeding neck. He made a 'tsk tsk' sound as he rummaged into his sleeves a fine, white handkerchief. All the guards in that hall had their breaths held.

"Officer, if you keep killing, or incurring anymore cuts to these children...won't you agree that some interested for new servants would lower their prices for them?" the old man asked, patting the blood off from Misaki's neck.

Afraid now that these things would displease the head of the family he was serving, he bowed and laughed uncomfortably. "My...my apologies Lee-sama..."

"No worries," he patted Misaki on the cheek like how the man-in-charge earlier did to the previous boy. But this old man didn't smile. "It's best for you to talk if you want to keep alive young man."

For the first time, in all those two months of walking under the Autumn's chill, Takahashi Misaki opened his mouth. For the teen, his tongue felt thick and dry. The others in the line were shivering on their spots but Misaki just stood without a sign of respect. He didn't care anymore who he was facing. If his head rolls on the ground because of that, so be it. He'd never bow to anyone anymore.

"Leave me alone."

Because it came off as just a breath, it was only the old man Lee who heard that small voice. He looked up as if thinking and then grabbed the boy's still tied arms.

"Alright...I'm taking this with me."

"Ha?" the man-in-charge exclaimed, stupefied. "I mean...I'm sorry? If you want a servant Lee-sama, there are still plenty of better looking kids here-that looks worse than a peasan-"

"I like this kid," the other replied, playing with Misaki's dirty, prickly hair. "Release his chains."

Unsure of what to do, the man-in-charge straightened up and tried to talk out with the old man.

"Lee-sama...I don't think the Young Lord would be pleased if he heard about this!"

The old man pouted as if he was still a young boy. His lavender eyes weren't smiling though.

"So what? He may be the Official Head of this Family now...but I am still his grandfather and the second in command," he mumbled in a low voice which sounded thunderous still. "Release him now."

As the soldiers waiting for orders watched the chains around the sickly looking boy's arm being removed, they only had two thoughts. That that boy would be no doubt the old man's play thing or the kid must have some talent only the old man could see.

Usami Akito, a man of prideful seventy years preferred to be called as Lee. Ever since he passed the entire power of this family to his grandson, rumors had it that the old man had started living the carefree and careless life. His hobby, a little peculiar.

Either the boy being chosen by the 'Master Lee' was lucky because he would surely be living a life better than a royalty, or he was plainly cursed to serve the whims of an odd, old man.

As for the boy of the matter, he really didn't care.

* * *

><p>If the soldiers could see Misaki now, they'd be shaking their heads, mumbling 'I knew it'.<p>

Dressed in a clean, silk Kimono Misaki had never even tried wearing in his life was presented with food on the low table.

His skin had become rough from all the forced walking he had to endure together with the other prisoners from their old master's castle to their new master's territory, the Usami's. His green orbs would really be stunning in the pale, sakura color of his garment if he wasn't looking so uninterested in living anymore.

The old man sitting across the low table, sipping his tea produced a sigh. "Try smiling."

Misaki from the untouched food, darted a chilly gaze at the old man. Then he just stared back at the exquisite food with no change of expression.

"I was planning on saving one little soul earlier," the old man mumbled, before stuffing a sliced apple in his mouth. "It just happened to be you. So don't get cocky with me. You're nothing special."

After waiting for a response to no avail, Lee sighed even more. It was better talking to air. At least there were times it would whistle. But the old man understood perfectly the situation. Kids from the low class were practically raised to serve one family. Their ideas, concepts and views revolved only around that master. Losing one's master would be the same as losing their reason for living.

"Little one, tell me...are you cursing my Grandson to death now because of losing your master? The way you act, seems like you worked directly for the Head."

It was a question that finally got the boy's attention. Misaki looked directly at the purple eyes with contempt.

"It's normal and you're entitled to it," the old man said, nodding at Misaki's direction. "But let me tell you one thing, there would always be two sides of the story. You think we're evil? Our people think your master is evil."

Misaki opened his mouth to say something. But chose to close them once more.

"Your Master's name...Sumi was it? I've heard he was wanting favor from the Shoguns and Emperor and resorted to mining more gold than needed. And since our territory is the nearest, despite two months of walking, started mining in our land. And still had the courage to

draw fangs by killing our messengers. Tell me...who started this whole farce?"

The boy gritted his teeth.

"If you trace the chain, it was all because of your Daimyo's greed. He may be a good man, but his decision as a leader resulted to his entire family and wealth wiped out, and that's why you're here."

"I don't want a new master."

A smile crossed the old man's face. Clearly he was stunning himself in his younger years.

"I don't want a servant either."

* * *

><p>Just a month had passed. Just that very short period of time, the blazing red and gold around the castle had turned into a picture of white. And Misaki, the boy who became the well-known whore of the Iris Castle who only belonged to Usami Akito, had morphed into a slightly young man. Youthful, pale as the snow outside and expressionless.<p>

As usual, wherever Master Lee roamed around the castle, there would always be the young man dressed in expensive and exquisite garments even the royal ladies in the Emperor's palace would be put to shame.

"He's so pampered...how could he stomach such an old man?"

"Who cares if he could live that way?"

These were words Takahashi Misaki had been hearing from the slaves. Words that circled around but never got out of the castle's walls. Words so stingy, words so demeaning and words he hated.

They kept on walking. But behind them was a sound of commotion that started getting louder and nearer. Master Lee stopped walking, circled his arms around Misaki's shoulders and waited for the grand entourage of one man. His grandson, Usami Akihiko.

"Welcome home."

The new comer, dressed in full black with still the remnants of snow threw a dull glance from the old man to the boy. Neither was mockery or appreciation on his face. One could almost say that the Daimyo that just arrived wasn't regarding the boy toy of his grandfather at all.

"This is my Misaki. Isn't he cute?"

" I came all the way from dealing with that stupid war, hearing my great grandfather had gone crazy..." the deep voice, colder than winter commented. He shook a dust of snow from his shoulders and looked at the spacing boy standing beside his grandfather. "...seems like it's true."

* * *

><p>The sound of a single candle on a gold base was rather hypnotizing and calm. The soft winter night's breeze and the occasional sounds of fabrics were the only signs that both men sitting across each other were alive.<p>

"How's the situation in Sumi's territory?" Master Lee asked, drawing something on a fabric a picture of a bee.

"Fixed. Their land is ours and all."

Usami Akito was expecting the younger male to ask more, but his grandson seemed to be in a foul mood to even start talking.

"Not gonna ask about my rare find?"

Usami Akihiko, turning twenty-eight, already a mature man by standards slowly glanced at his grandfather's direction. The candle light dancing in his fully, intense orbs.

Many had said, specially the old servants of the family that the young Master looked exactly the same as his grandfather when the old man was still in his prime. He had prominent nose, sharp lavender eyes so deep one would think this man was always pondering something cunning. The only difference might be Akihiko's seriousness compared to the previous head's perplexing kindness.

"My only concern, is even the slaves are making a laughing stock of the previous Head. If you are so pent up old man, there are other women out there, or if you really had that strange want, there are trained males. Why pick a trash out of nowhere?"

The old man contemplated for a few moments and then made a small "Ha" as he looked at his finished drawing.

"Do you know why I took that kid?" Master Lee asked with a gentle smile. "He smelled of honey. Days of walking out in the open and yet, that sweetness was calling for attention."

Usami Akihiko, the current Head of Usami Family made the ever slightest grimace as he sipped his cold sake. "Please, I do not wish to hear of your peculiar tastes."

"Aww...you really still have a lot to learn!" the old man said shaking his head. "What I mean is he's a treasure. I can feel it. Run your instincts here stupid man. That boy is going to be a good asset someday."

The old man kept his meaningful smile on his lips before folding the fabric neatly on the low table. His wrinkled hand looked like a huge tree with branching out roots. These were the times Usami Akihiko could really tell, his grandfather was really old.

"No...actually, I've seen him once."

Usami Akihiko looked surprised but that was just for a fleeting moment. The old man didn't even notice.

"A few months ago, during Kagami Shogun son's coming-of-age, you didn't accompany me then, I saw that kid standing beside that Feudal

Lord Sumi."

"Well, then that kid is a noble's son?"

The old man knitted his brows and looked eye to eye with his grandson. Sometimes he wondered if he was looking at a mirror of his young self.

"Hmm...I doubt that. That kid never raised his bowed head and just followed Sumi everywhere."

Akihiko leered. "Then he could be a guard, an attendant or Sumi's little toy too."

"I don't know..." Master Lee mumbled, disappointment obvious.

"You don't know?" Akihiko showed a look of annoyance. "Then ask him. What he was doing beside that unworthy Daimyo. As simple as that."

Sighing, Master Lee rested his chin against his clasped hands. "I just get this feeling from Misaki...rather than not wanting to disclose anything, it feels like he doesn't know himself."

"If I get anything suspicious about him, I won't even ask for your permission old man. I'd torture him myself. Don't forget, he was from that greedy family. A family, a servant or not, don't be too soft on that thing."

"The only thing I know is he's precious Akihiko...I think he'll bring change in this castle," the old man continued. "I'd compare him to a cashew nut. It's got a hard shell outside but really gives you a satisfying taste once you've broken it down, doesn't it? Anyway...you love cashews right?"

It was all Akihiko could do to keep his temper in check. "I'll pass."

"He amuses me even when he's doing nothing..." the old man said ending it with a merry chuckle.

Akihiko watched the shadows of the dying candle, imagining the porcelain statue he had seen earlier. The kid looked so devoid of life and yet he could make his grandfather, a fairly strict man in reality, laugh?

The younger male grunted. His grandfather was a healthy man, with a healthy drive no less. What just happened to his taste?

* * *

><p>Tired from facing all the responsibilities of an ending war, the triumphant side couldn't just take it easy. And being the Master, he had to make sure all possible spies were eradicated, the new lands inspected and the prisoners of war sent to their territory for whatever purposes.<p>

Pondering at all those things now, Usami Akihiko thought if he made a mistake with the last. There were always a number of noble women ready to be a certain entertainment even for an old man as long as

that old man was of high status. What was with this deathly looking servant his grandfather took a liking of so different about?

Grimacing, he didn't want to have an argument with the old man. The previous master was old no doubt, and did a remarkable job into steering the family into its current state. Akihiko would have been happy obliging with the weird old man if he wasn't playing with a 'boy' that came out of nowhere.

"He's there...scooping of snow and making a ball out of it..."

Akihiko was in the middle of his walk from too much duties. Stretching his legs and enjoying the view of the afternoon. The sound of smug giggling and mutterings ruined the peace all so suddenly.

"Did you see earlier? That whore actually had the nerve to ignore the previous Master as if he was the Emperor...he's enjoying the pampering too much..."

"He's being pampered too much, indeed. He eats on the same table as Master Lee, he stares at the Master's eyes as though they were equals!"

"Would it be so strange? He's a whore after all, it's his job to satisfy and in turn he gets satisfied with all these treatment...Master Akito is really weird..."

Finding the source of the ill-mannered talking, Usami stood behind two women servants who were hiding behind a turn. Their eyes openly stuck at the figure, languidly sitting on the snow outside as if it wasn't cold at all.

"If I ever hear this thing around the castle once more, you'll see your tongues on your plates for supper."

Face growing ashen, they didn't dare meet the gaze. Just from the black, silk robe they could see as they looked at the wooden floor beams, they already knew who they were facing.

"We're sorry Master..." they mumbled in unison.

"That warning doesn't only apply to the two of you. Spread the word."

Two frightened women disappeared silently from the Master's sight. And annoyed at the reason of everything, he took calculating steps until he was already standing under the eaves. Having been used to moving soundlessly, the busy boy outside seemed to not have noticed his sudden new audience.

The man was standing some meters away. He had this habit of observing people and looking at that boy in an expensive, sky-colored kimono for women, scraping snow with his hands forming them into silly shapes, he could clearly see, the boy was just...a boy. There was nothing special about him.

If he could only just dispose of that smudge of dirt, he would have

done so. But the old man would surely throw a dragon's fit.

In his eyes, the boy was nothing but an opportunist. He had seen all too many stories about men with men. All common denominator? The other was only there for gain. That servant was far too early in even trying to seduce a Daimyo such as him.

As though finally the object of rumor now felt a glare at the back of his head, he looked back behind him. As still the slave he was, the boy was expected to bow. Expected to acknowledge Usami Akihiko's presence. But all Misaki ever did was look up, disregard Akihiko and continue doing his sculptures.

"Impertinent fool..."

The master, as blank as his face was walked over the small pile the boy had made and crushed it with his foot.

Misaki watched the balls he had made grow shapeless and ruined back to its usual form. After everything of he did was flat on the ground, Misaki gazed up. He squinted at the silhouette of the man which had gone black from the contrast of the setting sun.

"Feeling like a princess are we?"

"..."

"Say, do you act like this all the time? Scared and lonely, having my stupid grandfather around your finger in effect?"

"...?"

"Let me guess, you're trying to act this frail for me to pity you as well? My eyes aren't as blurry as my grandfather's, fool."

Misaki stood. His clothes wet from the snow, the boy started sweeping them clean with hands a color of the slightest blue.

"He is a caring man," the boy replied, not looking up.

"You talk as if you two are equals, huh?" Akihiko repeated with a tone of mockery. "Since when did a noble became friends with a whore?"

The kid grew silent for a very long time while Akihiko thought the kid was so boneless it irritated him all the more. To his surprise, the kid suddenly giggled. And his giggles, from low had grown into a hysterical laugh.

"..."

The current Master of the Usami Clan was too stunned to even react. All his thousands of men, bow down in fear of him, never even wanting to meet gazes with him. And yet, there in that golden, snowy afternoon, he found this guileful young man laughing insane about something Akihiko couldn't understand.

"Do you have a death wish?"

Misaki stopped laughing and just started making a circle against the

snow with his foot. Just then Akihiko realized that the boy was bare footed. It came across him that perhaps, this kid was really doing a slow suicide.

"I'm giving you a warning servant. Not because your master is my grandfather, you can act like this in front of me. I have the ability to send your head rolling on this very ground."

The insolent kid looked up. Such were his green eyes into a flare of fury, his fists clenching into a tight ball.

"I am no servant of anybody," the boy answered sternly. "I have only one master and he's already dead."

Akihiko, as a short-tempered, prideful man he was, it was a miracle his fist didn't land on that irritating, young face. He merely raised one fine brow, imagining the Feudal Lord Sumi whom his army had defeated. Was that man really that gracious to have this person in front of him vow all the loyalty in the world? Akihiko couldn't find a thing so much respectable about Sumi at all. Unless this kid before him was too infatuated he was crazy.

"You're so loyal to Sumi aren't you?"

Misaki looked like he was going to be sick all so suddenly. "Who ever said Sumi was my Master?"

The talk was getting longer than the powerful Daimyo had expected. The gold rays had disappeared, the air chillier, and the shadows casted this eerie, unreadable atmosphere as if Usami was indeed talking to a living dead.

"Maybe I really owe you one," Misaki mumbled thinking deeply.

Akihiko wondered what the boy was about to do. To his surprise the kid, acting insolent a while ago gave him a perfect bow. One that only those born in a high status family or someone who'd been used to bowing could do. Anyone could bend forward. But not everyone could bow graciously.

"Thank you for having Sumi killed. Appreciate it."

Misaki, having straightened up unceremoniously grabbed the Fuki of his Kimono, exposing feet almost blue from the cold and marched away.

Akihiko remained standing like a god there. He just stared at the little footprints before him and pondered on that small last mumble he heard from the boy.

"My only and real master is dead...I should have burned with him too."

* * *

><p>That night, wandering into the corridors of his castle, Usami decided to have a talk with his grandfather about his new found toy. The man knew his grandfather was a perfect judge of one's personality. So either his grandfather had picked up a cuddly,

porcelain decoration, or they had gotten themselves a silly disease. A disease that was slowly eating away at the base of their stronghold.<p>

His footsteps was as always, silent. His straight back, and straight gaze made him more regal, anyone would never think twice about his nobility. The maze of the hallways was his garden. Its dimness his advantage.

The chilly air brushing on his face, he came across two old men carrying a wooden tray of white fabric, ink and writing tools. They bowed deeply to the Master of the Clan bidding him a good night.

"Why are two of our advisers here?" Akihiko asked without batting an eyelash.

Bowing even more, they finally faced the man and smiled calmly. They both had white hairs, but it looked dirty compared to the pure snow that covered their estate.

"Oh, Master you didn't know?"

"Know what?"

"We come here every night to teach 'that kid'," one of the old men replied.

By that 'that kid', Akihiko already knew who it was. But it bothered him.

"Teaching him? Ordered by the old man?"

"Yes, Master," the other replied. "The boy couldn't read or write, so it pitied Master Lee, that the boy just stared at the scrolls all day without understanding them."

After a few moments of silence, the two bowed once more and started their leave.

"If you'll excuse us Master. But we have to get going."

Standing there in the middle of the once again empty wooden passages, Akihiko knitted his brows. His steps had become hurried and loud as he headed to his grandfather's quarters.

* * *

><p>"Oh...Akihiko...I was just about to go to Misaki's quarter..." was the old man's words when they met in the hallways. Akihiko with his usual frown, Akito with his usual old smile.<p>

"Old man, what on Earth is going on here?" Akihiko hissed, stepping a foot forward and just realized, really realized that his once tall and huge grandfather, had become a foot shorter than him. He wouldn't admit it to the world, but it frightened him.

"Ah that?" Master Lee smiled, his hand on his chest as he started walking forward, the grandson with no choice but to follow along. "What's so wrong in educating him?"

They grew silent for a long while. Turning into the mazes, to the turns only the two of them knew. Their steps both silent and their shadows painted against the walls.

"Akihiko..."

"What?"

"Do you still remember what I told you when I passed you the responsibilities for this Family?"

Akihiko frowned even more. His lavender eyes never left his grandfather's head.

"The most loyal person a leader could ever get is not a loyal servant but a 'real' friend," the old man answered his own question, glancing at his grandson's direction before looking forward again. "...A perfect lover should be a friend. Your family should be your friend. Basically, everyone around you should be your friend first before you could trust them fully."

The younger male grunted, running a calloused hand from sword training over his smooth face. "Stop talking in riddles and just say it straight old man."

Master Lee chuckled. "You know what I mean."

Akihiko and Master Lee found themselves finally standing before an intricately designed paper walls called Shoji. And since the evening was becoming deeper, the light of the candles inside the room gave moving shadows against it. Like there was a shadow show going on for them.

"Welcome to our nightly rendezvous...it's tiring it's wearing me out," Master Lee mumbled with a smile. "I teach him a lot of weird positions you know?" he added stopping a laugh. "...Positions of the stars, the mountains and the rivers..."

Akihiko just looked at the door blankly, totally not being amused by his grandfather's humor.

"The rumor of that kid as my whore? They all came from the mouths of servants who are rotten with jealousy. There's no sense of stopping a swarm of annoying bees is there?"

The younger male drew a deep breath and looked at the old man squarely in the eyes. "Why are you doing this for that kid?"

"No reason," was the instant reply. "He is the first person to tell me straightly that my drawing sucks though. All those people praised them, almost singing how good they are even if I just doodled a dot. A friend tells you something real even if it hurts, so..."

A wrinkled hand held on to the paper sliding doors and pushed them to the side. It revealed two old men with wrinkled foreheads, and a young man with an equally appalled expression.

"Make a friend that would never betray you Akihiko," was the old man's words before he entered the cluttered room.

The reigning Master did not enter the room though and made his leave silently. He knew exactly what his grandfather was saying; That most of their men was just loyal to him because he was the grandson of the previous master. Such shallow chain could easily break anytime. And that he should make an alliance where a bond would glue them together.

Akihiko found it strange though, that his grandfather was seemingly implying for him to befriend the insolent kid. Yeah, the kid who could bow like a royalty but couldn't read or write to save himself.

"Utter contradictions..."

* * *

><p>vocs:<p>

*daimyo- were the most powerful feudal rulers in Japan. Reigning in the 10th century to the middle 19th century.

*the Emperor is literally like a God before

shuusetsu's blabbering (いゝ¥_いゝ¥"•)

This idea was brought upon by the hot springs a few weeks ago. it pulled me into thinking of the pasts of the Earth. Have I ever mentioned that I love history?

I've used up many Japanese terms but please be reminded this is a fiction and I have more than added all of the crazy stuff my head could entertain.

This will be the second time I am going with this theme after **'The Torn Canvas'. **(So I hope as well that people who have read that story and enjoyed it, would also find pleasure in this new tale).

WWWWWWWWWW..even my way of talking...has become like this... (あー•あゑ;-)あゑ

So imagine an alien, drooling in front of the laptop as this creature tap tap tap away. WWWWWW

-shuusetsu/5huu53t5u

up-dates on my profile! thank you.

2. Chapter 2

ã€•ã€•ã€•Precious than Goldã€'ã€'ã€'

Friction

* * *

><p>He hated winters the most. From when he started getting aware of his surroundings, down to the present where he was still as

freedom-less as he could remember. Winter was always harsh. In its coldness and whistling breeze always carried this lingering omen of bad luck. And now that everywhere he looked, and even when he wasn't looking, there was no denying of the season. A deep worry, almost intolerable would always chain him on spot in return.<p>

Tossing and turning under the warm blankets, he could still not sleep. The oil lamp remained showering him a little light in the darkness and he could only watch the flickering and soft flame for comfort. He disliked the dark. A fear he had since he was a child. A fear he still carry, growing and spreading as years go by.

"..."

He grabbed the blanket tighter around him. Yet the chill inside him remained.

In his childhood, he was told to stay in the darkness for safety. When he grew a little older, he and his master had to stay in the darkness to escape. Forced to be a slave of a greedy and hard Daimyo, many times he was thrown in the darkness as punishment. He had seen all the hues and colors of darkness there could ever be. When he closes his eyes to sleep, peace was still a stranger.

"..."

Shivers ran down his spine. His beloved master died at a winter night as cold as this night too. Was it a jest of fate that the snow was storming down, yet his town was being devoured and engulfed in fire? Nobody could even scream. They were all slaughtered before being burned like sacrificial animals. Those masked people surprised them. What did they even do?

His master who's weak in countenance, his master who was never strong to begin with sheltered the little feverish him amidst the raining of burning arrows.

"M-master?"

"All the things you know...all the things I taught you...never speak of them."

"B-but..."

"Promise me."

His mind was not working. He was having the flu, his master was injured, his world was crumbling and burning down, he could not understand a thing. All the young him could do was to nod.

"Don't worry...don't worry...tomorrow you'll be fine."

"..."

By the time the raining of arrows had stopped, when there was only smoke mixed in with the mist, his master was already as cold and stiff as the icy sheet that had become of the little pond near their small home.

"..."

The tomorrow his master had promised never came. He was ten when the village burned away from the map. He spent five years of wandering serving all kinds of people just to fill his stomach. Falling into the wrong feudal Lord, it was three years of being a slave for the Sumi's, now a slave again for the Usami's.

All his tomorrows, just as why his village had been eradicated, remained as bleak.

* * *

><p>The news about how the Usami Clan had defeated the Sumi clan after the latter planned on stealing the Usami territory for gold was circling nonstop. What was more was the fact that the person in charge was the new and young Master of the family. It placed the Usami Family into a much higher status, power and fame. And because of this, gifts from other noble families, the ones from the top down to the ones pretending to be part of the nobles flowed into the Iris castle's front gates day and night.<p>

Usami Akihiko remained expressionless, not a sign of fatigue for a man who was working perhaps even in his sleep. At his study, there was almost no room for him to move. Scrolls of glittering ribbons, gifts in exquisite fabrics, he didn't even so much glance at them. And if one rolls away from the pile, he'd crush and step on it as though they didn't matter.

They were all presents; silks, precious gems, greetings, even the ones coming from the Emperor, he never paid them attention. If he could, he would throw them all into the fire and ignore everyone. Yet part of his responsibility was to make appreciation notes with the Usami Family's Crest despite not having an ounce of appreciation for all of it. Not replying would be considered rude and might be the cause of another problem with another Clan or with the Royal Palace. He had to act neutral.

"Useless fools..." Akihiko coldly mumbled after rolling a scroll which came from a Daimyo from a far province. He slowly gripped the fabric and tore it apart, little by little, carefully, as if enjoying its destruction beyond repair.

Most of the pile on his left side were portraits. Out of all the gifts, Akihiko found the wedding proposals the most ridiculous. He would smile at each seductive portraits of gorgeous women while tearing them or burning them slowly with the candle close to him.

Compared to his grandfather, he had even greater dreams. More than wanting to get into the Imperial Palace and be a loyal dog of that young Emperor, Akihiko was intending to make the clan powerful in terms of wealth and in politics. So much powerful that the Imperial Palace would collapse without their Clan's support.

Now busy reading a long detailed list of the accounting reports regarding the wealth they accumulated from the Sumi Clan, a slight breeze made the lavender eyes pause. The candle's flame slightly dimmed before it went back to normal. And then he resumed looking at the list as though nothing happened. But all his senses were focused on the shadow against the window of his room.

_"Master," _a soft voice, almost like it was just the blowing wind called. In its tone carried reverence.

"You took longer than I had instructed," the Daimyo gravely whispered in the air, flipping to another page of the list. "Report."

"Most of the record of the Sumi's, including their family registry, slaves, soldiers and business dealings had been destroyed during the feud. Skimming through all the remaining servants who worked for Lord Sumi had been most difficult."

"..."

"There are five remaining of them. These Sumi servants wouldn't talk...not until they were subjected to psychological tortures did one of them speak."

"And?"

_"Master," _the voice shifted into a much careful tone. _"The mistress and the previous Head suddenly died. The next in line, Lord Kitagawa Mamoru who's supposed to take over fell ill. This gave way to a mere son from a branch family to take over. That son is Lord Sumi."_

Akihiko let the scroll limply on the table, eyes slightly moving towards the shadow against the window.

"According to the servant, Lord Sumi made his way to the top easily right after he bought a certain male servant named Misaki, three years to date. That servant was not allowed to leave Sumi's side."

"..."

"Also Master, even the people inside the Sumi mansion does not really know anything profound about the child, except he was bought from a slave seller from the South."

"In summary," Akihiko whispered, one corner of his lips curling up. It was a smile he always had when he's very displeased. "...you just got nothing to report."

"I beg Master's forgiveness..."

Lavender eyes finally darted away from the shadow. "Trace him again. Do not return until you've got something worthwhile to present."

At first glance, Akihiko's obsession with finding the real identity of his grandfather's toy seemed pointless. However, he didn't like the idea that a complete stranger was always beside his aging grandfather. There had been a number of times that Usami Akito had almost been killed. Perhaps it was due to age and the old man's way of compensating for being a harsh Lord during his reign, but the old man now was much trusting, much whimsical and less careful. The trace of the once feared Daimyo who'd killed hundreds was no more. Only an old man acting childlike was present.

Instincts told the current Daimyo there was something odd about that

green-eyed servant. As harmless as the kid seemed to be, a strange air of uncertainty too was hovering around the young man. Hazy, foggy, unclear. Just like what Akihiko would feel when a snake was lingering close to him.

"Understood."

The candle flicked momentarily in time with the vanishing of the presence. And the Daimyo who was always deep in thought had not moved a single inch from his seat. The candle has long died out, leaving him in the devouring blackness of his room. The wind came knocking at his windows. The silent cries of ghosts of the past accompanied him in the dim.

"..."

Minutes had become hours. Hours had reached the break of dawn. The Daimyo finally stood and went out of his study. The second he stepped out under the eaves, the silver lining of the mountains from afar was already mixed in with the pinkish and soft glows of the still sleepy sun.

He started walking, in his usual silent movements, moving into the inner sections of the Iris castle. From a far he would look like he was only gliding on air. His long silver hair flowing behind his back, his careful movements, the quiet gaze, the silvery and hazy mist of early morning on him made him look a bit of a human than a stone who could move.

It was still considerably dark, and red lanterns only lit the outside and insides of the estate. No one would notice, but walking allows him to think things more clearly. So walking he would do, pausing and observing things through the eyes that always see beyond the surface.

"...?"

The Daimyo paused on his tracks. He thought he had caught a scent of something. But more than smelling in itself, it was more of a sensation that pricked on his skin.

He stepped into the darkness of the hallways, hearing the slight footsteps that were drawing closer.

Usami Akihiko had been trained under the harshest conditions. He didn't become the Daimyo due to blood alone. His educators had been strict but he was more strict to himself than them. He was a scholar yet under his skin he was a soldier, fighter, warrior through and through. In his very core a warning flag had been built. A habit he formed that saved him a number of times from traitors, from death. That flag was up high and waiving inside his head.

"..."

In the company of shadows, the Daimyo stood, lavender eyes eyeing a certain figure that emerged breaking his peace. His grandfather's so-called 'rare find' was loitering in where it was supposed to be off-limits; Takahashi Misaki.

Shadows of body outlines painted the walls. Such were the unassuming

disarrayed layers of peach-colored kimono and the loosely tied obi around the kid's waist that was not making any justification to how much expensive and valuable the garment really was. Mostly for young ladies of noble families, the male servant just wore them now like his second skin. It was only a huge confirmation of the favor this kid receives from the old man. Just why was the old man so into doting and lavishing a servant?

'...'

With narrowed eyes, Akihiko could still remember the glee Usami Akito had when the old man was selecting that garment. The old man had such bright smile and youthful energy as he kept on bothering the lady selling these exquisite clothes. Peach, sky-blue, pale-yellow, innocent pink, they were mostly the hues Akihiko's mother used to wear. The happiness on that old man's face was engraved at the back of his mind, so no matter how suspicious or distrustful he still was to the 'rare find', he couldn't do a thing. He respected the old man. And if this will lead the old man having a peaceful and sweet descend to his twilight, he would purse his lips.

"..."

At this point in winter every year, Master Lee would always be away, invited into a pre-new-year's celebration of an old time friend. His distance about a week by walking or three days by carriage. Even when the old man was a bit far, he never failed to send back home clothes or sweets to Misaki, making everyone in the castle call the latter names; pet, leech, toilet, all getting harsher, all getting meaner.

Since Usami Akito was out on a personal journey, more of a yearly activity for fellow aging nobles, this kid should by no means be allowed loitering around the castle as if he owned it. Yet there he was, seeing places he shouldn't.

"..."

Misaki silently made his way towards the seemingly endless maze of hallways and turns. However, the boy stopped upon seeing a dead end. A whole wall of grey marble stood great before him leading to nowhere. The kid then gave a sigh and turned on his heels. When he did, his eyes landed straight at an image that wasn't there earlier. Inches from his face were golden threads looping and embroidered as Hanashoubu. Intricate and regal, the Usami emblem, the Japanese Iris. It was always found around the chest area, shoulders and back of the master's robe. And indeed when green eyes brought his eyes further up, lavender eyes of animosity met him.

"What are you doing?"

The shorter male took a step back instinctively. But he found himself more cornered instead.

"I asked you, what are you doing?"

Misaki slightly lowered his gaze. "I was told there's an archive around here...I lost my way."

"At this time? I didn't know you're such an eager learner. In

addition, there's nothing in the archive for your current level."

At his own words, Akihiko seemed to have realized something not entirely impossible. "_Unless illiteracy is just a front."_

"I couldn't sleep..."

"Oh..." the Master of the Clan narrowed his eyes. "Aren't pets supposed to stay good in their cages when the master's not around? Wag their tails when the owner's relatives pass by?"

The green eyes which were mostly passive earlier looked up again. Meeting the master eye to eye would have been strictly forbidden, yet the kid did with such revulsion.

"Akito-san is not my master. Neither are you."

"'_Akito-san'_" Akihiko repeated, everything but his eyes smiling. "_Neither are you'_"

Glinting eyes remained fixed at the round ones looking back at him. There was an imposing merciless glare in the older man's eyes that even wolfhounds cower. When Akihiko finally saw a ripple of uncertainty in the kid's eyes, a wave of strange satisfaction came into him. The Daimyo roared with laughter. Misaki who had promised himself that he'd stay strong on his ground felt a sudden chill crawl all over his skin.

The laughter was already frightening. Yet the silence that descended after it died down brought a different surge of cautiousness to the kid. More so when he saw the gap between them was fastly disappearing.

Next thing Misaki knew, he got the Daimyo's mouth speaking close to his ear.

"So you know fear."

"..." The kid's body went stiff.

"Listen to me real good," the Daimyo whispered. "_Be careful_"

The brunette, still covered in the darkness of the Daimyo's shadow, did not respond. He couldn't. He had known to fear Sumi for the man's evil deeds. But the fear that struck Misaki this time was entirely different.

Just as fast as the man closed in was as fast as how he abandoned the malicious distance. On the Daimyo's face was an indescribable look as though he was seeing something he really despised. The kid who was left plastered against the cold stone remained holding his breath.

"Know your place."

The older man turned around hastily, his long silver locks almost reaching Misaki's face. Like fine threads they fell down in complete perfection around the Daimyo's back, framing his face when the man slightly glanced back at Misaki.

"Oh by the way..."

"..."

"I heard you were some sort of a lucky charm to Sumi and enjoyed a lot of pampering."

"...?!"

Lavender eyes didn't fail to notice the sudden loss of color on the boy's face. The obvious reaction of the boy confirmed one of the Daimyo's gut feeling. This kid did something either great or despicable for Sumi.

Satisfied with what he saw, the Daimyo finally left.

"..."

Not until Misaki could no longer see the Daimyo's silhouette did he release a sigh, though sighing did no good into calming him. If anything, the green eyes remained fixed at the still dark hallway tainted with the faint red glow of the lanterns evenly spread out along the passages.

"..."

Misaki deeply wished that winter leaves soon. So that just as how Usami Akito had promised him before leaving, he'd grant the boy a seal as a released and free existence. It might be considered as a lowly status the same as merchants, but it's freedom nevertheless.

Once the slumbering Cherry Blossoms around the Iris castle have awakened, he could finally leave.

Earnestly he prayed, that it won't be just a continuation of those tomorrows that never came.

* * *

<p>chapter end notes:

****I am not the flower-type of person but Hana-ayame or Hana-shoubu èŒ±è•-è'² or Japanese Iris or Iris Ensata is something I find really intriguing and pretty. So I thought it'd make a good emblem. XD Plus, my fave kind is a budding Hanashoubu, with white outer petals surrounding the inner purple ones. It makes me remember Usami Akihiko right away. So I went with this flower. XD

**** also, if you didn't know, there is no 'Japanese National flower' although most consider it to be the 'Sakura'. The Imperial Emblem is 'Chrysanthemum'. So in a way, both flowers represent Japan.

Thanks for the kind words! XD I am indeed enjoying writing this.

~~shuusetzu (with all of my efforts, i'd stick with my up-dates-they're on my profile. (;ï¿½ ï½¥ï¿½) i hope i can!(_ "))

End
file.